

REMARKS

Claims 1-11 and 29-35 are cancelled; claims 12-28 are amended and remain pending in the application.

The Examiner has lodged several 35 U.S.C. §112 rejections against various of claims 12-28. Applicant has amended the claims to address the Examiner's rejections, and believes that such amendments overcome the rejections. Applicant therefore respectfully requests that the Examiner withdraw the §112 rejections in the Examiner's next action.

Claims 12-28 stand rejected as being unpatentable over Applicant's admitted prior art (AAPA), Inoue (U.S. Patent No. 6,443,816), Nishimura (U.S. Patent No. 6,332,835) and Lorimer (U.S. Patent No. 6,589,878) in various combinations. Applicant has amended independent claims 12 and 20, from which the remaining claims 13-19 and 21-28 depend, and believes that such amendments place all of the pending claims 12-28 in condition for allowance over the cited references.

The specific amendments to the claims 12 and 20 add recitations that material is flowed through a recited steam outlet port and across a polishing pad surface as the polishing pad surface is rubbed with a conditioning stone, with an entirety of such material being in vapor phase, and with the material containing steam.

The Examiner cites Applicant's submitted prior art for showing that it was known in the art to condition a polishing pad surface with a conditioning stone, and cites Inoue for showing that it was known in the art to utilize steam during conditioning of a polishing pad surface. The Examiner then contends that it would have been obvious to utilize the steam

of Inoue in combination with the admitted prior art teaching of utilization of a conditioning stone to accomplish Applicant's recited methods of claims 12 and 20 for flowing steam onto a polishing pad surface as the surface is rubbed with a conditioning stone.

Without admission as to the propriety of the Examiner's contention that originally-filed claims 12 and 20 were obvious over the combination of Applicant's admitted prior art and Inoue, Applicant respectfully submits that the amendments to claims 12 and 20 provided herein place such claims in condition for allowance over the combination of the Applicant's admitted prior art and Inoue. Specifically, Applicant notes that Inoue specifies processes in which a two-phase combination is utilized for cleaning a polishing surface (the two-phase combination includes a cleaning liquid and a gas (see, for example, the Abstract of Inoue)), whereas Applicant's amended claims 12 and 20 recite methods in which only a single phase of material is flowed through spray nozzles during a conditioning operation (such single phase is a recited vapor phase of the amended claims).

The Examiner's cited references do not suggest or disclose a process in which an entirety of the material flowed through steam outlets is in a vapor phase as the material is flowed across a polishing pad surface while the polishing pad surface is rubbed with the conditioning stone. Accordingly, the cited references do not suggest or disclose the recited subject matter of amended claims 12 and 20. Applicant therefore respectfully requests formal allowance of claims 12 and 20 in the Examiner's next action.

Claims 13-19 and 21-28 depend from claims 12 and 20, and are therefore allowable for the reasons discussed above regarding claims 12 and 20.

Pending claims 12-28 are allowable for the reasons discussed above, and Applicant therefore requests formal allowance of such claims in the Examiner's next action.

Respectfully submitted,

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By: 

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